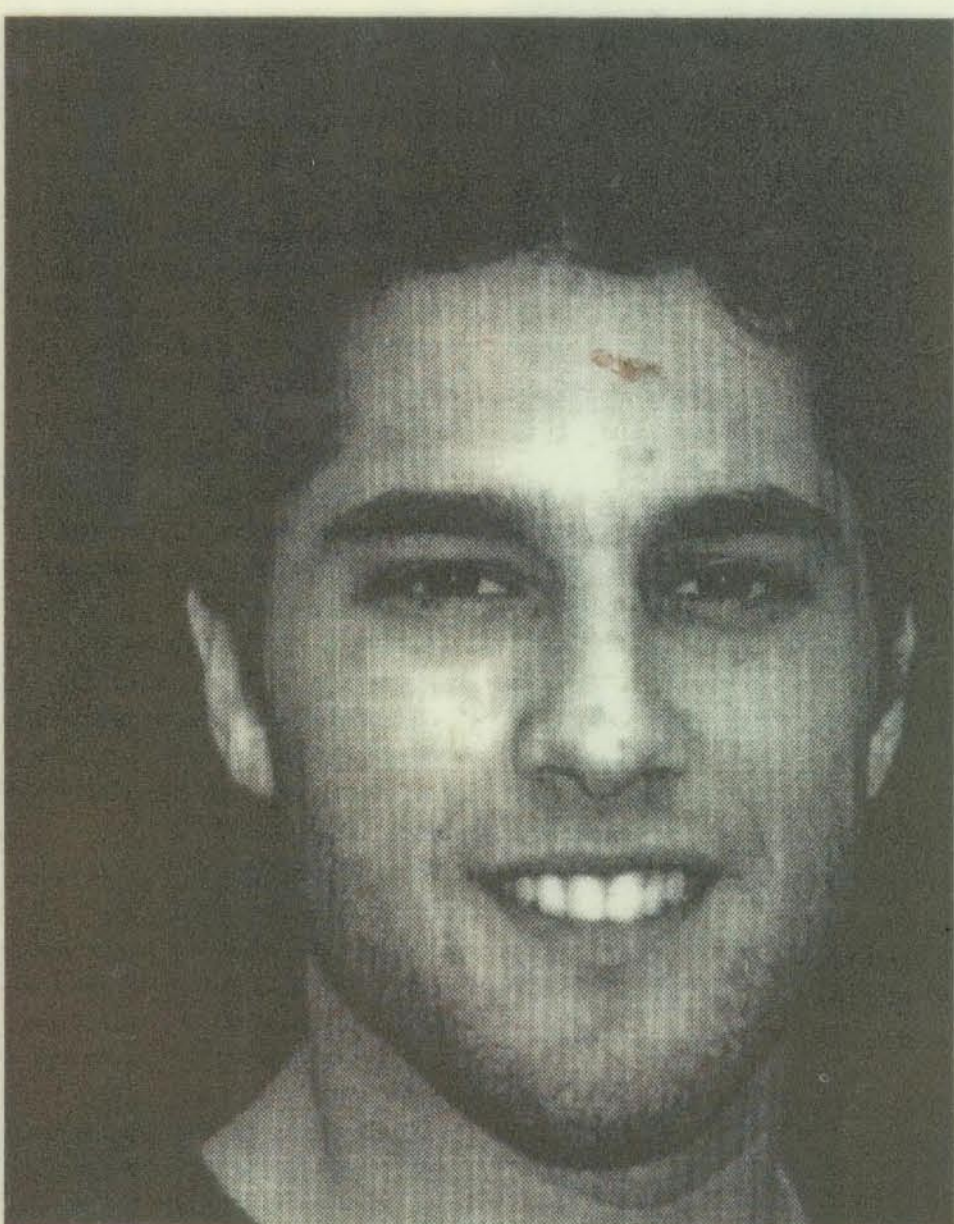


# ATHLETE OF THE MONTH



▲JOEL GERSON

## MARTIAL ARTS DISCIPLINES FOREST HILL STUDENT

BY DAVID EGGLESTON

It may not have made TSN's *SportsDesk*, but when Joel Gerson beat a member of the Canadian National Judo Team, it was an upset that caused waves throughout the martial arts world.

Joel was 15 and holder of a relatively modest Orange Belt. His opponent was a second degree Black Belt.

"I remember I beat him with an arm lock," said Gerson, now 21 and holder of the gold medal in the middle-weight division at the recent Canadian National Open Jiu Jitsu championships. "It wasn't supposed

to have happened."  
"When I watch the tape of the match today, I can see my eyes watering up after I won. It's one of my biggest moments."

There have been a few since that day for the Forest Hill resident. He is a three-time Gold Medalist at the Ontario Judo Championships and has designs on representing Canada next year in U.S. and international competition.

And he's also busy during the school year with his studies at the University of Toronto, where he has completed his second year of an Industrial Relations degree program.

Excelling in sport and scholastics requires discipline and that's

something Joel gets from the martial art of Jiu Jitsu — a combination of unarmed combat and physical training. He's been at it since he was 14 and started competing seriously shortly after that.

"Originally I got into martial arts for the reasons all kids do," says the soft-spoken, powerfully-built athlete. "I wanted to learn the discipline and it was the stuff we all saw in movies. But I wasn't sure if Karate and Kung fu suited my personality that much. I wanted something a little more practical."

He found it in Jiu Jitsu and currently trains under Moni Aizik, chief instructor at the Samurai Club in Richmond Hill.

"From the second you start, you are sacrificing," he says. "For example, I didn't have time for team sports in high school and I couldn't do as much mountain biking as before."

"But you have to figure out priorities early on and try to balance everything out."

And his priority, he says firmly, is school — even when you get back from a practice at 10 p.m. and you're tired and sore, or your injured knee is sending pain coursing through you. Gerson has already had to overcome torn knee cartilage earlier this year. He can train up to seven times a week in the summer and four to five times a week during school.

As memorable as was Gerson's victory over his heavily-favoured opponent six years ago, he takes as much satisfaction in working with youngsters.

"I just started teaching — to see the effects on them and their reactions — it's the same as when I started out," he explains.

Gerson is solidifying his place as a rising star in the martial arts world. He handily won an international tournament in Virginia last month. He took home \$7,000 for his victory in the 175-pound and under category.